





















































































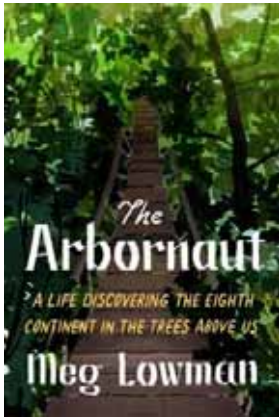








## Book Review *The Arbornaut* by Meg Lowman



Release date August 2021,  
327 pages.

Meg Lowman loved being outdoors as a child. There she collected flowers, pine cones, and bird eggs. In 1964, at the age of 10, she won second prize in the New York State Science Fair for her collection of pressed and dried wildflowers. She continued her explorations of the environment and found a wonderful summer camp in Capon Bridge, West Virginia, where she met other kids who shared her passion for the outdoors. She attended that camp for six summers as a camper and then as a counselor. She then chose to attend Williams College because it had a forest on its campus, and she decided to make the study of trees her lifelong passion. After a year at Duke University's forestry school, she transferred to the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, where she studied ecology in the cloudy Scottish Highlands. Meg then relocated to Australia to get her Ph.D. because the University of Sydney offered her a scholarship. Looking at trees from the ground was like studying a body by looking at a big toe. She realized that to really understand trees

you had to get up in their crowns. Using a strong slingshot to shoot a rope around a high tree branch and mountain climbing equipment, she was able to go up in the crowns of trees and study the plants and animals living there. She found thousands of species of beetles and epiphytes (plants that grow on other plants but are not parasites) that had never been found before.

After getting her Ph.D., Meg married an Australian sheep farmer and moved to his 5,000-acre "station" where he and his father raised sheep. Meg investigated why so many eucalypt trees, a common tree in Australia, were dying. It was believed that it was due to koalas eating their leaves, but she found it was due to insect predation--some trees had their leaves completely eaten three times in a season. Meg wanted to continue her research activities while running her home and raising two boys, but pressures from her in-laws made it just too difficult. When she got an offer from Williams College to be a visiting professor, she moved with her sons back to Massachusetts. Her career has included teaching, setting up new programs at North Carolina Museum of Science and Marie Selby Botanical Garden in Sarasota, Florida, and working all over the world to preserve forests and educate people on the importance of forests. She has worked on projects to build canopy walkways in Asia, the United States, and Australia so that people can experience what is going on there. Meg has mentored many young women and men in the fields of botany and ecology.

This book is written very clearly without being technical and dry, and it goes into detail about how a botanist conducts field research. At the end of each chapter is a section describing an important tree species; the trees of Australia, Africa, and Asia are very different from our native trees. There is a very helpful glossary of botanical terms. Meg concludes her book describing how trees are necessary for our planet for oxygen, erosion control, fresh water, wildlife, storage of carbon, and many other benefits. While the statistics on forest loss are alarming, we can still do many things to educate people on the importance of forests, how to prevent their destruction, and how to establish new forests.

***Betty Hedges, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener***